



# House Policy Committee *Policy Perspective*

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*Christopher Cox, Chairman*

## *50 Out of 5,000 Years A 'Flyspeck' in Chinese History*

# The Communist Detour on the Road to Freedom In China

**October 1, 1999**

On October 1, 1999, the People's Republic of China will "celebrate" 50 years of Communist Party rule over mainland China. It is an appropriate opportunity to reflect on the impact of a half century of one-party control in the Middle Kingdom, from Mao to Jiang.

The Chinese civilization and culture have an extraordinarily rich history extending over five millennia. Of China's 5,000-year history, the 50-year Communist interlude represents but one percent—a mere flyspeck. It is an anomaly, giving rise to the question: when will the Chinese people be free from Communist rule?

### *Recent Events in the People's Republic of China*

In May 1999, ten years after the infamous massacre of the democracy demonstrators of Tiananmen Square, other, very different protests occurred in Beijing and throughout China. These demonstrations, unlike their democratic antecedents, were orchestrated by the Communist government. Their purpose was to exploit the tragedy in Belgrade during which NATO missiles mistakenly hit the PRC embassy. But unlike the Tiananmen protests of 1989, during which a statue of the Goddess of Democracy drew conscious parallels with America's Statue of Liberty, the government-organized demonstrations of 1999 were explicitly anti-American. Whereas the Tiananmen demonstrations were a genuine expression of nascent democracy, the more recent state-organized violence was a cynical parody of democracy.

Will China in the future resemble the vision of the 1989 idealists who defied their Communist rulers? Or will Chinese society remain subject to the will of the Communist Party Politburo, which continues to reject those ideals?

Communist Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, who along with his comrades was hailed by President Clinton last year as "the right leadership at the right time," gave his preferred answer to this question at a recent Chinese Communist Party anniversary gathering: "The [Communist] system must not be shaken, weakened or discarded at any time.... The western mode of political systems must never be copied."

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Under Jiang's direction, the ruling Communist Party has undertaken a massive government effort to suppress the freedom of the Chinese people—focusing in particular on censoring ideas and information. In 1998, the PRC convicted Lin Hai, a web page designer, for “inciting subversion of state power” by exchanging e-mail addresses with Chinese supporters of democracy in the United States. In September 1999, PRC authorities arrested Qi Yanchen, a 35-year-old bank employee, and confiscated his computer. Chi faces life imprisonment for “subversion” because he published articles calling for political reform in China. TIME magazine was shocked to find its recent special Asia edition, titled “China’s Angry Half Century,” banned in the PRC. The magazine, while mostly laudatory about the Communist Party, included alternative views of China’s future written by the Dalai Lama and democracy activists Wei Jingsheng and Fang Lizhi.

In the year since President Clinton visited China, the regime has unleashed the harshest political and religious repression since the Tiananmen massacre. Hundreds of supporters of the China Democratic Party have been arrested thus far in 1999. And in a move reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, 1,200 Communist Party cadres accused of sympathizing with Falun Gong, a pacifist non-political organization, were detained and transported to a northern Chinese city for “re-education.”

The U. S. State Department’s latest Human Rights Report provides a grim picture of human rights in the PRC, noting “widespread and well-documented human rights abuses... [including] instances of extrajudicial killings, torture and mistreatment of prisoners, forced confessions, arbitrary arrest and detention, lengthy incommunicado detention, and denial of due process.” The annual report cites “restrictions on freedom of speech and of the press, ... freedom of assembly, and ... freedom of association, religion, and movement.” The Beijing regime’s shortcomings include “[d]iscrimination against women, minorities, and the disabled; violence against women, including coercive family planning practices--which sometimes include forced abortion and forced sterilization; prostitution, trafficking in women and children, and the abuse of children.”

According to the State Department’s annual report, the PRC “continued to restrict tightly worker rights, and forced labor remains a problem.” And the situation is even more severe in areas that are not inhabited by ethnic Chinese: “Serious human rights abuses persisted in minority areas, including Tibet and Xinjiang, where restrictions on religion and other fundamental freedoms intensified [over previous years].”

Recently more than 80 survivors of the PRC’s “laogai” (“Reform Through Labor”) work camps for political prisoners met in Washington to tell the world about the PRC’s continuing human rights violations. Four to six million people are today imprisoned in the nearly 1,000 camps that are part of the infamous laogai system, where the victims, according to laogai survivor Harry Wu, “are tortured and murdered.”

Much attention has been paid to the Communist Party’s efforts at economic modernization. But according to Lian Shengde, a student leader in the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement who was imprisoned in the laogai system before he was forever exiled from his native China, “The international community has the ability to stop... this totalitarian crackdown on Chinese citizens, because the Chinese Government right now needs international

investment; they need international relationships.” The question is whether commercial investment will be used to promote civil and political reform in China, or rather whether it will simply underwrite the Communist Party’s continued control.

### ***Fifty Years of Communism: A Review***

The stark legacy of a half-century of Communism in China, by all accounts, has been misery and death on a gigantic scale. The succession of China's Communist regimes has been responsible for the deaths of over 40 million Chinese citizens, through famine, political persecution, and execution:

- Soon after it captured Beijing in 1949, the Communist Party executed at least one million landowners as part of its agrarian “reform” policy of controlling and redistributing land. The program resulted in the deaths of nearly four million additional Chinese citizens, who were seen as sympathizing with the landowners.
- During the 1950s, the Communists conducted pogroms against an estimated one million members of the Chinese Nationalist Party.
- The Communist Party took China into the Korean war against America, South Korea, and the United Nations in 1951, putting many Nationalists on the front lines, and killing over 700,000 Chinese.
- Beginning in 1957, Mao Zedong’s Communist leadership forced millions of party cadres into “re-education” and “self-criticism” camps when Mao ended his Hundred Flowers campaign and labeled those who had spoken out “enemies of the state.” Thousands died or were killed in labor camps.
- In 1958, Mao unleashed his “Great Leap Forward.” The campaign sought to force immediate collectivization of agriculture and imposed harsh demands on state-controlled industrial production. The campaign led to the most widespread, deadly famine in human history. An estimated 40 million Chinese men, women, and children died in just three years, 1959-61.
- In 1959, the Communist Party’s People’s Liberation Army conquered Tibet. In this conquest and its bloody aftermath, approximately 1.2 million Tibetans were killed.
- From 1966 to 1976, the Communist Party waged its “Cultural Revolution” against the people and civilization of China. Over two million Chinese were killed, and millions more so-called counter-revolutionaries filled laogai labor camps.
- In early 1979, after the end of the Vietnam war, the Chinese Communists under Deng Xiaoping invaded Vietnam. Thousands of Chinese troops were killed before the Vietnamese pushed the People’s Liberation Army back.
- On June 4, 1989, Deng Xiaoping used the People's Liberation Army to crush popular demonstrations in and around Tiananmen Square. Hundreds of peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators were killed. Many more were subsequently imprisoned

and executed. Deng popularized the motto “*wending yadao yiqie*”—“stability prevails over everything”—that same year.

- Jiang Zemin has continued the Communist Party’s heavy-handed repression of freedom in China. Beginning in 1998, he carried out the complete elimination of the Chinese Democratic Party. The 1998 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report concluded that the regime had undertaken to arrest all leading dissidents, and that by year’s end, none remained active. In 1999 Jiang directed the state to crush the Falun Gong, a peaceful, non-political spiritual movement. Following these crackdowns, Jiang has ordered a nationwide return to the study of Marxism and strict adherence to atheism.
- Jiang's possible heir apparent, Vice President Hu Jintao, offers little prospect for improvement. Hu led a savage campaign of repression as the Communist Party Secretary in Tibet, and along with Jiang was a leader in the crackdown on the Falun Gong.

### ***The PRC’s Growing Military Assertiveness***

The Communist Party under Jiang Zemin has, as Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro wrote in the March 1997 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, determined “to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia.... It has, therefore, worked to reduce American influence in Asia... to build up a military with force projection capability, and to expand its presence in the South China and East China Seas so that it controls the region's essential sea-lanes.”

Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, himself an authoritarian, has observed about the PRC: “Many medium and small countries in Asia are uneasy that China may want to resume the imperial status it had in earlier centuries, and have misgivings about being treated as vassal states having to send tribute to China as they used to in past centuries.”

Even in recent months, as it seeks Washington’s approval for its admission to the World Trade Organization, the PRC has been openly antagonistic toward American and allied interests around the world:

- During the conflict in Kosovo, America’s so-called "strategic partner" in Beijing inaugurated the most vicious propaganda campaign against the U.S. since the Cultural Revolution.
- When U. S. and NATO forces *accidentally* struck the PRC’s Belgrade embassy on May 7, the PRC responded by *deliberately* attacking U.S. diplomatic posts across China—severely damaging the embassy in Beijing and destroying facilities in Chengdu. Beijing rejected the U.S. explanation and apologies, asserting to its people and the world that the United States deliberately murdered PRC nationals and violated international law.
- During the horrible violence in East Timor, the PRC opposed the introduction of peacekeepers to protect the people who had voted for independence.

- In July 1999, the Chinese Communists cut off the cross-Strait talks with Taiwan and threatened to conquer Taiwan by force—a threat repeated increasingly loudly throughout the balance of 1999. In the heat of this bellicose rhetoric, the PRC declared on July 15, 1999, that it possessed the neutron bomb—whose plans it stole from the United States. On September 30, Premier Zhu Rongji—a noted “moderate”—warned a large audience of U.S. business executives in Shanghai that the PRC was “impatient” to resolve the Taiwan question “at an early date” and explicitly threatened the use of armed force.
- In late July, in a threat not just to Taiwan but also to the continental United States, China’s official Xinhua news agency boasted that Communist Chinese ballistic missile submarines could strike targets worldwide.
- In August 1998 and in 1999, the PRC chose not to use its diplomatic leverage with North Korea to restrain Kim Jong Il from testing missiles. In fact, unclassified sources report that North Korea’s missile technology has benefited from PRC expertise.
- On August 2, 1999, the PRC tested its own new, road-mobile, long-range missile capable of reaching the United States. Sending a characteristic signal of defiance, the PRC’s *Dong Feng (East Wind)*-31 test occurred less than a week after the Congress had approved extension of normal trade relations with the PRC.
- The Select Committee on U. S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People’s Republic of China revealed that during the late 1990s, the PRC illegally obtained U.S. developmental and research technology that could be used to attack US satellites and submarines.
- The PRC stole U.S. research and development work on electromagnetic weapons technology during the late 1990s.
- The most recent CIA report of PRC theft of highly classified nuclear weapons design information occurred in the late 1990s.
- In 1998, the CIA identified the PRC as the number one proliferator of weapons of mass destruction technology in the world.

It remains to be seen whether the PRC’s increasingly belligerent behavior and its military buildup will contribute to the preservation of Communist rule in China, or rather precipitate its demise. Much depends on the U.S. and the free world. When asked what the United States can do to promote democracy in its dealings with Beijing, Chinese democrat Wei Jingsheng replied, “be as strong as China.” Undoubtedly, Wei referred not just to military strength, but to political resolve. Not only can American military strength send a reassuring signal to those within China who aspire for democracy, but also U.S. diplomatic strength can counter attempted PRC coercion of other nations, and guarantee smaller regional powers the breathing space to pursue their own economic and democratic development.

## *How Long Will Communism in China Survive?*

Despite Jiang's boast that China will "never" reject its Communist system of one-party rule, both Chinese history and the history of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century predict otherwise. President Ronald Reagan clearly foresaw that the Tiananmen massacre marked the beginning of the end for Communism in China. In 1989, he stated unequivocally: "You can't massacre an idea. You cannot run tanks over hope. You cannot riddle a people's yearning with bullets. Those heroic Chinese students who gave their lives have released the spirit of democracy and it cannot be called back."

China's best known leader of the democracy movement, Wei Jingsheng, has summarized the Communist dilemma in the following terms: "The Communist Party's control of China is like a wooden house in which all the beams are rotten. We do not know when the house will fall, whether it will be in ten minutes with the next gust of wind, or ten hours, or ten days; but we can be certain that the house will fall. I don't think we shall have to wait as long as ten years."

In the years following Tiananmen, confidence in the Communist regime's political stability and longevity has waned. According to PRC analyst Jack A. Goldstone, "The combination of forces revealed [at Tiananmen]—a coalition of merchants, entrepreneurs, urban workers, students and intellectuals, with some support from within the regime, in revolt against a government that survived only because of continued loyalty of key military and bureaucratic leaders—is quite similar to that of past patterns of Chinese revolt."

Even more importantly, the ruling Communist party is losing its battle for the minds of the people of China. In a 1999 analysis entitled "Is China Stable?," Minxin Pei of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote:

Even within China, signs of danger and nervousness abound. Arguably, the Chinese government now faces the most severe challenge since the Tiananmen Square demonstrations a decade ago. ...[T]he government [is maintaining] a tight watch over the country's tiny dissident community lest something akin to the 1989 movement break out again."

Bernstein and Munro, in their March 1997 *Foreign Affairs* article, have noted that "China's leaders, facing the prospect of social uprisings, are sure to stress patriotic solidarity and unquestioned leadership." But the Party's campaign to stress nationalism (instead of Communist ideology and the legitimacy of one-party rule, both of which are hugely unpopular) has encountered only mixed success. In a man-on-the-street interview, one Beijing resident recently told the *Washington Post*: "Definitely life has improved, but it's not like the party says. It's not like they've done anything for us."

An article in the *Economist* (December 19, 1998) concluded, "combine ethnic tensions on the fringes of the Chinese empire with regional tensions along the coast and you have good reason to believe that China is more likely to disintegrate than is commonly believed." Robert D. Kaplan (author of *China: A World Power Again*) argues, "Continued central rule from Beijing over such a vast and increasingly populous nation may require more tyranny, not less. But because more tyranny would ignite further strife, China may well separate into economic fiefdoms, organized around great urban regions such as Shanghai, in the north, and Kunming, in

southern China's Yunnan Province, whose economic power is extending into Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand.”

For the time being, however, the PRC's immediate strategy is simply more Communist control. As Ross and Monroe put it: “The most likely form for China to assume [in the short run] is a kind of corporatist, militarized, nationalist state, one with some similarity to the fascist states of Mussolini or Francisco Franco.”

### ***Conclusion***

If any nation on earth deserves political, religious, and economic freedom, it is the earth's most populous one. China's 5,000-year-old civilization is truly one of the wonders of the world. In many facets of human endeavor—art, religion, literature, commerce—it has produced marvels. Its peoples have made and are making vastly important contributions to the world.

The PRC's Communist rulers did not produce these marvels or make these contributions. Indeed, first Maoism and more recently Jiang's “socialism with Chinese characteristics” have imposed alien ideologies on Chinese civilization. The contribution of fifty years of Communism to Chinese culture has been only to undermine it.

The Chinese Communist Party of 1999 maintains that the democracies that have taken root throughout East Asia—from New Delhi to Seoul, from Bangkok to Taipei, from Manila to Tokyo—are at odds with “Asian values.” But Marx, Lenin, and Engels are hardly the fountainheads of Asian culture. Nor is the authoritarianism preferred by today's Communist rulers in Beijing unique to the East: western regimes from Philip II, Louis XIV, and Bismarck, not to mention Hitler and Mussolini, have been fond of this so-called “value,” which found its most virulent expression in the totalist ideologies of Europe in the 20th Century.

It was the Chinese Communist Party, not Chinese democrats, or Tibetan Buddhists, or even Western influences, that devastated China's incomparable cultural heritage during the Cultural Revolution. The institution that has killed tens of millions of Chinese through execution, slave labor, and man-made famine, and that today imprisons Chinese citizens for their writings, does not mark the logical endpoint in China's long march through the millennia.

For these reasons, Communism in China by rights should follow Fascism, Naziism, and Soviet Communism to the ash heap of history. But that result is not inevitable; it will occur only if those who cherish freedom work diligently to bring it about.

Promoting a better American relationship with the PRC—and promoting both Asian security and human rights in the PRC—requires dealing with Beijing's rulers as they are today, not as we wish them to be. They are not our strategic partners. Pretending that they are has prompted a costly new arms race among India, Pakistan, North Korea, and the rest of Asia, and it has given comfort to PRC efforts to undermine America's stabilizing presence in the region.

The Communist Party's promotion of business and enterprise in China is a positive step, but even in a purely material sense it is woefully inadequate. After half a century of Communism, China's 1.3 billion citizens are able to buy far less from the U.S. than tiny Taiwan, with less than 2 percent as many people but a free economy and a stable democracy. China's markets will be free only when China's people are free.

American policy towards China must keep in mind the goals we should be seeking: civil, political, intellectual, and religious freedom for the world's most populous nation, and the swift release of one of the world's greatest civilizations from the Communist bondage of the past fifty years. For the sake of China's people, let us hope that this is one anniversary the world will not need to observe much longer.